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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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DANIEL CURLEY:

The Man Who Was Drafted

The bus driver closed the door, and the man who had the papers, the man in the blue pin-stripe suit, began once again to check the roll. "Adams," he said. "Here." He answered himself and made a mark on the paper. No one laughed this time although they had all shouted with loud laughter when he did it up in the Draft Board office the first time they were all together and face to face. But they didn't laugh now that they were submerged in the bus seats and looking out the windows where they could see only whoever was there for a man to see when he was going off alone like this.

Robert Andrews saw Don and Betty Marshall. There was no one else within a thousand miles who could have stood outside that bus that day for him to see as he went off alone. He had asked them not

to come but they had come anyway, still high from the party the night before and getting higher all the time by nipping at 7-up bottles filled with martinis. Everyone else was quietly and decently waiting for the bus to leave, but Don and Betty, drinking martinis through straws, laughed and giggled and peeked at him between their fingers as if between bars. In reply he could only attempt to smile.

While the man in the pin-stripe suit, Adams, finished calling the roll, Don ran up to the bus and drew with his fingers — standing wildly on the guard rail he could reach well enough — in the light film of dust on the window, a ragged series of bars.

As soon as the driver released the brakes and the bus began to roll ever so slightly, all the people, except Don and Betty, turned their backs and began to file into the waiting room, but Don and Betty ran after the bus out of the station and into the street, laughing, waving their bottles and peeking between their fingers. Robert Andrews pressed his face to the pane and kept them in view until the bus turned the corner and hit the highway. Then he sank back into the seat and tipped his hat over his face and sat rigidly still, as he had wanted to do from the very beginning.

He wasn't able to stay long under his hat though. He could feel the bus dropping down hills and swinging around curves, and he could see in his mind's eye the woods and fields rushing past, and he wanted to see them really as he had seen them so many times along this road. He came out from under his hat along that stretch of road where you first smell the paper mill when you are coming into town, and he knew that he should any minute now be no longer smelling the mill, if indeed you can ever be said to stop smelling something you have been smelling for so long that you don't any longer know it stinks.

With one hand deep in the pocket of his old reversible coat gripping the fifth of special Scotch that Don and Betty had given him just before he got on the bus, he came out from under his hat and saw the brown land and the black trees rushing past the window — the land and the trees rising suddenly into hills against the sun. That was exactly right, at least for the time of year, and reassured he rolled his head back on the back of the seat and looked into the bus, still with his hand on the bottle. There was nothing to see. The seat across the aisle was empty. But he could hear laughter and talk everywhere. Slowly and carefully he slid his head up the back of the seat like a periscope. He saw a man in shirt sleeves, hat on the back of his head, vest unbuttoned, blow on his fist and take a quick step and throw

like a bowler. "Eighter from Decatur," the man said. "What's on that other one?" he said. "One," someone said. The man grunted and reached for the dice. In the first seat Adams in the pin-stripe suit was reading through his papers. He underscored phrases with a silver pencil and constantly pushed back his coat and shirt cuff to uncover his watch although he never looked up from the papers. Robert Andrews swiveled his head around, again like a periscope, saw the group in the back seat passing a bottle from hand to hand, and slid back down into the seat with the whole picture to think about. In addition he knew that somewhere, slumped down and hidden by the tall seats, were the two men who had to be carried into the bus. He thought, not for the first time, that he had made a mistake in not going home to register for the draft and in allowing himself to be taken here among strangers a long way off. A man said, "Six. God damn it, six, where are you?" And in the back of the bus there was loud laughter.

The land was still brown and the trees black, but now there were houses and filling stations and off in the distance the black smoke of the mills at the edge of the first of the two big cities they would have to pass through. Robert Andrews rested his secret bottle on his thigh and took from another pocket of his coat a *Time* that Don and Betty had made him take in the bus station when they discovered that he had brought nothing to read. He had intended to bring nothing. They couldn't understand that. He had intended to go into this new life as nearly naked as the law allowed. Under his old coat, which should have been long ago discarded, he wore only an old sweat shirt and old pants frayed at the cuffs and thin in the seat. On his feet he wore torn tennis shoes. When he got his new clothes he could step out of the old and leave them where they fell.

He automatically noted the date on the cover of the magazine and as automatically thought, Already? but of course it was because there was no doubt in his mind what the date was on his induction notice. He riffled quickly through the pages and saw briefly the vanishing faces of famous men and maps of famous places, gains and losses, charts and graphs. He began reading at the back and read forward through books, art, movies, education, religion. He read always more and more slowly as they rode into the city watching, always longer and longer, store windows, people walking, and the smooth silk knees of women driving beside the tall bus.

And then he turned from the window. Someone in the back of the

bus was calling, "Sergeant, sergeant, bring the soldier medicine quick. I got a bad attack." There was a loud laugh at this, and the whole group in the back of the bus began to shout, Sergeant, sergeant.

"OK," a man called from the front, "I'm coming." He staggered down the aisle waving a unmarked bottle of almost colorless stuff that could only be corn whiskey. He stopped at Robert Andrews' seat. "Was it you who was sick?" he said.

"I'm all right," Robert Andrews said, one hand on his private bottle.

Hardly had the man stepped away when someone said clearly, "Captain, you sure saved my life." And someone else began to sing, For he's a jolly good captain.

"Have a drink of mine, captain," someone said.

"Don't mind if I do," the man said. "I didn't get much of my own." There was a loud laugh from the group. "Stand back," the man said, "and give me room to lift this bottle." He staggered back up the aisle as far as Robert Andrews' seat. He lifted a half pint bottle in salute and then drank steadily until it was empty.

"Hey, my whiskey," someone said. The rest laughed.

"That's no captain," someone said. "He drinks like a colonel."

"Colonel, hell, a general."

"Come on, general, give the man back his bottle." They all laughed.

"That's the last whiskey on the bus." They all groaned.

"Come on, general, let us smell your breath anyway." But the general was collapsing onto the floor like a rope that is slowly and gently lowered to the ground.

Robert Andrews frankly half stood up and watched them carry the general to the back seat and lay him out. He was still there when the bus stopped in the terminal, and they left him to sleep while they all went directly from the bus into the restaurant under the close scrutiny of the military police.

Once inside the restaurant, Robert Andrews found himself seated in a booth with three of the men from the back of the bus. All three wore zippered jackets, one with an athletic letter, I.

"You played football in high school?" Robert Andrews said seizing on the most obvious conversational gambit because in this compacted booth in this well-lighted restaurant he felt host to these three others and obligated. Actually, he knew, his clothes were like theirs but even shabbier, and he had no obvious right, but he wasn't his clothes, and although he had dressed intentionally he felt he must demonstrate

to them that he wasn't at all what he appeared.

"Me?" the man with the athletic letter said.

"Yes," Robert Andrews said, "the letter on your jacket."

"Oh, it's the general's jacket," the man said. "I never went to high school."

"I remember him well," another man said. "He was years ahead of me in Indianhead, but I saw him play often."

"I saw him play up here —" The third man looked around quickly and was silent, for here was now hundreds of miles away.

"He would have shown them a thing or two if he went to the university," the other said.

"I didn't ever hear of him," the man wearing the jacket said. "I'm going next table with some friends of mine." He went to the next booth, and Adams came back in exchange.

"Welcome to our home, Adams," Robert Andrews said, waving him to the one unoccupied space in the booth. Adams slid in easily. He was perhaps the only one who had availed himself of the rest room to wash and comb his hair, and although it was impossible, he even looked freshly shaved. "I was about to ask our friends if they would care for a small Scotch before dinner."

"Excellent, excellent," Adams said. "A small one." From the motion of his shoulders Robert Andrews judged he was rubbing his hands under the table. "Excellent," he said again.

"I really need it," one of the men said.

"Me too," the other said.

Robert Andrews reached for the bottle in the inside pocket of his reversible coat, the inside pocket being always in the tweed side, not the waterproof side. When he first went away to school he had insisted on a reversible coat — to say nothing of saddle shoes — and had bought with his mother's help the coat with the beautiful piece of Harris tweed which, after the first time he turned it out to please his mother when he went off on the train, never again saw the light of day: and even then it looked like rain before he got to New York and standing in the car in the dark approaches to Grand Central he turned his coat — for the last time that coat.

"I always enjoy a quiet drink before dinner," Robert Andrews said, "and perhaps on this occasion not too small a drink either." As he worked on the bottle he smiled at Adams. Adams' shoulders continued to twitch with the unseen motion of his hands. "And now," he poured Scotch, a good double shot of his good going-away Scotch,

into each of the empty glasses that had been ready on the table when they came in, "your very good health, gentlemen." He raised his glass. They clutched their glasses tensely, except Adams, who would, of course, have been to many a lodge banquet. "And success in your — shall I say our? — new career." He sipped slowly. Adams sipped slowly. The other two gulped without stopping.

"Oh, god," one said.

"Amen," the other said.

The waitress was setting the plates on the table. "Perhaps another drop?" Robert Andrews said. They both nodded. He gave them a scant shot more.

"Liquor, by god," someone said. "A whole god damn bottle of liquor." The man wearing the general's jacket was looking over the back of his booth at Robert Andrews and his bottle. Robert Andrews looked back at him. "Well, pass the bottle to me and my friends," the man said. "We're near dead for a drink." Robert Andrews was speechless and motionless.

"Give me the damn bottle," the man said. He stretched for it but couldn't reach it.

"I'm having a quiet drink with my friends," Robert Andrews said at last. "Please leave us alone."

"I'll take it then." He lunged across the back of the booth, but his friends grabbed him and kept him from diving headlong into the middle of the table. All four of them started to come out of the booth. Robert Andrews clutched his bottle.

"Break it up," the military police said, the biggest men Robert Andrews had ever seen.

The other two men ate their supper quickly and went out to the bus. Adams, who lingered behind, said, "You did right. You did absolutely right. They were drunk." But Robert Andrews ducked into the washroom and bought, as he knew he could, a bottle of corn from the attendant.

The interior of the bus was dark and the streets deserted as they drove out of the heart of the city. Robert Andrews slumped in his seat, his hands stuffed into his coat pockets, one hand clutching through the cloth the Scotch deep in the inside pocket, the other hand feeling cold and direct the corn, which he hadn't yet found any chance to give to the men in the back of the bus, and all the while the time when he could do it was growing shorter and shorter, ticking away like the street lights that flicked all alike but each different past the window.

And then Adams came through the bus making another check. "Take it to them, Adams. You don't have to say it's from me."

"You shouldn't worry," Adams said. "You'll never see them after tomorrow."

"Someone else," Robert Andrews said. "Some other them."

Adams took the bottle and went on to the back of the bus.

"He can't buy us." And Robert Andrews slumped even further in his seat and pushed his hat over his eyes.

"To hell with him." It was completely dark inside the hat except when a brief glow from a street light seeped around the edges. Robert Andrews felt and heard Adams go back up the aisle, but he didn't stop and he didn't bring back the bottle.

Robert Andrews felt and heard the empty bottle strike the arm of his seat and break on the floor. He smelt the whiskey too but he didn't move. He closed his eyes under his hat.

When the bus stopped, he opened his eyes and peeked out from under the brim of his hat, but he could see nothing. There was no light in the bus or outside. He withdrew again under his hat with his eyes open and watchful. He heard the bus door open and someone said, "Military Police." Then very loud, "All right. Anyone want to spend his first night in the army in the guard house?"

"Don't volunteer for nothing," someone in the dark bus said. There were two or three isolated laughs that were quickly stifled.

Glass crunched suddenly under heavy shoes, and a light came on so strong that Robert Andrews could see all the inside of his hat. "What about him? Is he for it?" This was said right over him. No one said anything and Robert Andrews couldn't somehow move his hands to take off his hat. Someone touched the hat and it rolled down his stomach and over his legs to the floor. The flashlight was full in his face. He tried not to blink. "Well?" He didn't say anything. "Stand up." He got up and stood in the aisle. "Name?"

"Robert Andrews."

"Sit down."

They went on down the bus. Robert Andrews sat bolt upright. His hat was gone now for good. In the back of the bus the same voice said in the same intonation, "What about him?"

"He's sick, sir" someone said. "The bus ride made him sick."

"Sure it's not whiskey?"

"No, sir, he's really sick, but he'll be all right when we get there."

"All right. Leave him."

They flashed their lights in Robert Andrews' face as they passed, but they didn't stop.

In the barracks a soldier told them they had twenty minutes to make their beds and get ready for the night. At the end of that time Robert Andrews, who had brought nothing with him, sat on the edge of his bed. The lights went out. Men shouted and cursed in the dark. Robert Andrews dropped off all his clothes and slid naked into the cold bed. In the dark he fumbled his bottle out of his coat and took a long drink.

The man next to him — he had carefully taken an end bed — was cursing and thrashing around in the dark getting undressed and throwing his sheets and blankets over the bed. Robert Andrews took another drink. The man next to him was in bed now, still cursing and groaning a little now and then. "What's the matter?" Robert Andrews said. He regretted at once having volunteered the question.

But the man only said, "Sick."

"Too bad," Robert Andrews said.

"I need a drink so I can sleep," the man said. "A good long drink."

Robert Andrews recognized the voice of the man called the general. He leaned over to the general's bed and felt for his hand. The general shied. "Put out your hand and don't say anything," Robert Andrews said. He touched the general's chest with the bottle. The general grabbed it and drank quickly. "Put it on the floor between us," Robert Andrews said, "and help yourself."

"You're my friend," the general said. "You think I'm drunk but I know your voice. You're my friend and I'll remember."

Robert Andrews took another drink, and when a little later he reached for the bottle again, it was empty. He folded his hands on his chest and went to sleep.

II

On the morning of the third day it was at last certain: the army was rejecting him. By noon he had been cleared absolutely from the reception center, and he caught a bus into town without waiting for the army to provide transportation back to the city where he was drafted. Strangely, though, he was in no hurry to get back to the place where his trunk was still sitting in the middle of his room, where his rent had two weeks to run, where his job was not yet filled, and where his friends went about doing the things they had all always done. He

wasn't sure he wanted to go back, and if he didn't want to, he didn't have to. He had had his parties. He had said his goodbys. He had made his provisions.

When he got off the bus in town, he started to go into a hotel bar. It was a hotel of a chain he always patronized when he travelled, and he naturally started to go into this one. But he stopped at the doorway when he saw himself reflected in the plate glass door, his reflection swimming strangely through the dim lobby. He turned away from the hotel because although he was Robert Andrews beyond a shadow of a doubt, even to himself he didn't look like Robert Andrews. Clearly and objectively now that the glamour of going into the army was off him he looked like a bum.

He went on down the street to a little place that was dim with the faint light of neon tubes around the mirror behind the bar and the dull glow of chromium strips hidden in the dusk. There he drank the lunch special twenty-five cent highball right through the after-work rush and into the slack when everyone had gone home to supper. All afternoon while he and the bartender were alone he drank steadily, with the bartender even throwing in one now and then on the house. And then when it was quiet again and they were almost alone in the bar, the bartender said, "Why don't you take a walk?"

"Oh, no," Robert Andrews said," I'm not drunk."

"I know you're not drunk," the bartender said, "but you've drunk a lot of whiskey. Try a little walk."

"I really don't want to," Robert Andrews said.

"It would be good for you," the bartender said.

"If it will make you happy," Robert Andrews said.

"It won't make me happy," the bartender said, "but I think it's a good idea."

"OK, I'll take a walk around the block."

"And listen," the bartender said, "if you feel like drinking any more, come back here. Don't go anywhere else. They wouldn't know you from Adam, but come back here and let me take care of you."

"OK."

"You got that. Come back here, OK?"

"OK."

"Come back here," the bartender said. "I know what you're talking about. Lots wouldn't know but I know."

"OK," Robert Andrews said. And he walked out. He didn't know what it was that the bartender knew, but he knew about the

bartender's boy dead already in the war, and he knew the bartender knew something even if it wasn't exactly what he himself knew if he could only remember it.

Out in the street he marveled at the amount of whiskey he had drunk and how clear his head was. He began to walk slowly around the block, holding the buildings at arm's length with the tips of the fingers of his right hand.

Once started, he just kept going around the block, and after a while he said suddenly, "This is enough." He was standing in front of an optician's shop. The bronzed, fit, handsome dummy head in the window smiled at him. Robert Andrews had scowled at the dummy and shaken his fist and said, You lousy bastard. And then he said, This is enough, because he saw as he said it in an infinitely receding series of pictures of himself standing before the window, scowling, shaking his fist, and saying, You lousy bastard. He wondered how many times he had walked around the block and stopped in front of the window, but he didn't wonder for long. He only said, This is enough, and he knew that he had just to walk along the buildings until he came to the bar because he was sure, whatever else, that he hadn't crossed a street.

He was going along the back of the block, a dark street with warehouses and pawn shops, not paying much attention to where he was, when someone said, "How about a drink?"

Robert Andrews wasn't surprised to hear the voice suddenly out of the dark. His fingertips had told him already that they weren't touching brick, steel, wood, or glass. He hadn't got around to thinking about the fact, but he knew there was something there. When he turned his head he saw that his hand was resting lightly on the shoulder of a man's jacket. "What we need is another drink," the man said.

"I'm on my way to get one now," Robert Andrews said. "Come go with me."

"Got one right here," the man said, reaching for his hip pocket and staggering half across the sidewalk. "Alley up here where we can have a good quiet drink." He staggered off down the sidewalk, and Robert Andrews, trailing his fingers over the brick wall, followed along with him.

The man turned half around as he walked and staggered a few steps backward. "Come on," he said. "Just a little further."

Robert Andrews, straining his eyes to focus them farther ahead

than they had been focused all day, saw the red arc of a cigarette thrown into the street apparently from the solid brick wall. Wondering he watched and saw a uniformed policeman step out of the wall and walk toward them.

The other man, still staggering and turning as he walked, suddenly saw the policeman not ten feet from him. He checked himself and walked briskly past the policeman and disappeared into the wall.

"Good evening, officer," Robert Andrews said, stopping but still holding the building at arm's length.

"Evening," the policeman said.

"A fine evening," Robert Andrews said, demonstrating flawless enunciation. "A little brisk but quite suitable to this time of year."

"I suppose," the policeman said.

"If you are cold," Robert Andrews said, "my friend and I were just about to step into this alley for a drink. Perhaps you would care to join us?"

"No," the policeman said. He moved on.

Robert Andrews found himself about to go past the alley without stopping. He automatically kept his right hand on one building and with his left hand reached across to the other. Spread-eagled like that he was obliged to look into the alley, so he remembered that this was where he was supposed to be. Forcing the buildings apart with his hands, he went on down the alley and out the other end without finding anyone. He was distinctly displeased but when he got through the block, there he was back at his old bar.

God knows how long he had been walking round the block without seeing it, but he wasn't at all surprised to find the bar as soon as he became aware that he wanted a drink. He eased into his old place at the bar.

"Ah, there you are," the bartender said. He set up a drink. "How do you feel?"

"Beginning to go to pieces around the edges," Robert Andrews said.

"Take a couple of drinks and go to bed."

"I'm just having a quiet drink," Robert Andrews said. "I'm not making any trouble, am I?"

"None at all," the bartender said, "but you need sleep." Robert Andrews nodded and set down his glass. "Did you have a hat?" the bartender said.

Robert Andrews felt his head. "No," he said, "no hat at all." He turned and drifted out of the bar with his head pulled down into his

turned-up collar. He had no idea where he was, but he knew it didn't matter where he was. There was no place where he had to be. All places were alike. Even the place where his trunk stood in the middle of his still unrented room and his bare desk in the still unfilled office — even that place was like any other. It had no claim on him. He had broken all connection with the past, and now he was set down in a strange town where he could stay or move on as he pleased. There was no limit to where he could go. Miami, New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit, LA, Frisco, the banana republics — anywhere where no one knew him and where he could be someone else, someone reborn, washed in the blood of the tiger.

But he woke up on a bus with a ticket in his hand. The bus was dark and everyone else was asleep. He wanted to shout to the driver to find out where he was going, but he waited and when they came to a town and the driver put on the lights, then he could see that the ticket entitled him to a ride back to his room and his trunk and his desk and everything else — whatever it was — that had been everything until he got his draft notice and was forced to give it all up.

At the one transfer point, the only big city he had to get through on the way, he sat in the station while his bus was called and while it left and another was called and left. He was practically out just sitting there, but he didn't go to sleep, and when a policeman came through checking on bums sleeping in the bus station, he got up and walked out onto the street because not even his ticket could begin to explain why he was still sitting there.

The night, which had begun by being fine and cool, was now bitter cold and windy. He shivered inside his old reversible coat. He thought he could feel a cold spot on his body to correspond to each of the moth holes in the beautiful piece of Harris tweed.

He lingered as long as he dared over coffee and a barbeque sandwich and another cup of coffee. And a cigarette. And a—a—a phone call to a store across the street where there was no light. And another cigarette. And another try on the phone.

The night was colder than ever and the wind blew hard. As soon as he came to the first corner he changed direction to get the wind behind him. Even then he trembled violently with the cold and with fatigue. He had to get warm and he had to rest and he had to stay away from the bus station where the warm busses with the soft seats kept pulling out all the time all night long.

With the wind out of his face, he was able to lift his head a little

from his collar and look off down the street, so he saw at least half a dozen neon signs indicating small hotels, each up a dingy flight of stairs. Without thinking about it, he climbed up to the Hotel Bazaar.

There was no one sitting in the two straight chairs in the lobby and no one behind the desk. There was no one loitering beside the scrubby potted palm. He rang a bell a sign said to ring, but no one came. He sat down in one of the chairs and got up. He walked around the palm. The leaves were dusty and there were cigar butts in the pot. He started off down a long corridor that, other than the stairs, was the only way out of the lobby. Under a dim light toward the end of the corridor he could see the signs: Men — Women. He could smell faintly a sweet medicinal smell.

A door far down the corridor opened suddenly and a woman walked out and toward him. She wore a long robe that hobbled her, and as she got closer he could see that it was a rich blue silk, flowing, yet clinging as she moved, flattering too to her yellow hair. When she was very close he stopped, but she passed, brushing against his coat, without looking at him. He turned to look after her. There was a long golden dragon coiling up the back of her robe, its head resting on her shoulder. Trailing behind her was a blast of almost overwhelming perfume with a strong undertone of the sweet medicinal smell he had noticed before. He took a step after her, but she turned abruptly into a room. One instant she was there, and then there was a swirling robe settling about one bare heel raised for an instant out of a high-heeled backless slipper, and then the door closed and there was nothing.

He followed down the corridor but he wasn't sure which door she went in, and he went on down the stairs into the cold street, to the flashing neon signs, to the grit-ridden, paper-laden wind at the corner.

Sitting stupidly in the bus he hadn't intended to take or at least not yet, he watched the night weaken and a pillar of rosy light erect itself over the spot where the sun lay beneath the hills. He fingered the punched ticket entitling him to a ride to the place he hadn't intended to go, not yet, the place where his room was, his trunk, his job, his friends, and everything he had ever wanted or a man could ever want.

Then when the flat red sun itself came up in a valley and slid for a while behind a hill and came up again in another valley this time for the day, he knew he was getting close.

"Jesus," said a man behind him, "what's that stink?"

"Oh, that's the paper mill," another man said.

"How do you stand it around here?"

"Oh, you get used to it."

"How do you stand it until you get used to it?"

"You know you'll get used to it."

"Jesus," the first man said, "not me."

"Everybody gets used to it. You don't notice it after a while."

"Jesus."

It was full light in the town but early as he walked from the bus station to his room. There was little chance of meeting anyone he knew at that hour, but once he thought he saw a car he knew — Don Marshall's car — and he turned abruptly down a side street until it had passed. He would be able to get to his room and stay there for two or three days just lying on his bed and sleeping and thinking whatever he had to think about, a new man in an old town. With this in mind he bought bread and cheese and peanut butter and milk and a carton of cigarettes. And at another place he knew of he bought a dripping sack of beer cans pulled up by a secret rope from a forgotten well in a ruined cellar.

Then last of all he went down the steep driveway beside his house to the private door of his basement apartment that looked out directly into a savage ravine partially obscured by a heavy cedar thicket. He opened the door and went in. The room was still dark but he could make out his trunk in the middle of the floor. He could smell Betty Marshall's perfume still clinging to the room after the big farewell party the Marshalls had given him here and at their place and several other places along the way. He turned on the light.

Betty Marshall was sitting on the bed. "Hello," she said.

"Hello," he said.

"You're really back then. Don thought he saw you and called me from the plant to come over and see you."

The beer sack was dripping all over the floor. "I have to take care of this," he said.

She talked to him through the bathroom door. "I brought some whiskey," she said. "It's only the bootlegger special, not as good as the stuff we gave you to go away on, but tonight we'll really have a party."

"That's fine," he said, coming out of the bathroom with two wet glasses and taking the bottle that she had already opened for him.

R. P. BLACKMUR:

The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James:

Notes on *The Underlying Classic Form in the Novel.*

All that I have to say here springs from the conviction that in the novel, as elsewhere in the literary arts, what is called technical or executive form has as its final purpose to bring into being — to bring into performance, for the writer and for the reader — an instance of the feeling of what life is about. Technical form is our means of getting at, of finding, and then making something of, what we feel the form of life itself is: the tensions, the stresses, the deep relations and the terrible disrelations that inhabit them as they are made to come together in a particular struggle between manners and behaviour, between the ideal insight and the actual momentum in which the form of life is found. This is the form that underlies the forms we merely practice, and it is always different — like any shot in the dark — from the technical preconception of it: what you expected when you applied your technical skills in order to find it. It is also different — as anything revealed in a body of its own always is — from what your moral and intellectual preoccupations expected: for morals in action are never the same as morals prescribed; and indeed, this form, when found, refreshes and recharges your morals, remodels and revivifies your intellect. Thus there is a mutual inter-action. There is a wooing both ways; what is found is in some respect affected by the tools used, technical, moral and intellectual; and it is also true that what is found affects, for the instance, the medium in which it emerges, technical, moral, and intellectual. Out of all these in mutual relationship is created what Croce means by theoretic form for feeling, intuition, insight, what I mean by the theoretic form of life itself. This form, whatever you call it, because it persists for new emphasis, because it endures through phase after phase and through different kinds of attention after attention, I call classic: the underlying classic form in which things are held together in a living way, with the sense of life going on.

The classic, let us say, is the life that underlies the life we know: it is the source of our behaviour, it informs our behaviour, it is what we cope with when we cope with our behaviour. A little reflection

tells us that the most interesting questions we can raise about the underlying classic form in the novel will be those which enquire into the relations between it and the various forms of the mind with which it is always associated in fact, and which indeed are the only handles by which we take hold of it. This is especially so in a period like our own when works tend to be composed, and are largely read, as if the only conscious labour were the labour of technical form: the labour of the game of the mind, the play of its conventions and the play of its words. That is, we have to enquire what technical mastery has been made to stand for. If we do not ask such questions we are likely to be left with the notion that all that is necessary to heroism, in art or life, is technical skill and have no notion at all what it was — in morals, in intellect, and in what underlay both — that animated into action the art we heroize.

Something like this is the situation into which a good deal of Henry James criticism has lately fallen. To say this is not to make a discovery but a commonplace in the bad sense; it has been said all along, and to little point. My point is that the technical or executive forms of Henry James, when turned into fetishes if not rules, have been largely misunderstood both with regard to themselves and with regard to their mutual relations with other forms. Both the ideal and the substantial origin of classic form has been ignored, on the one hand; and on the other hand, by critics concerned immediately with morals or what is called the liberal imagination, the poetic — the creative — aspects of James' language and the conventions of his forms have been minimised and cheapened to perception. I am not concerned to repair these damages but to meditate on them along several paths of meditation. The paths are well-known and our feet fit them, if not our thoughts; we have only to fit our thoughts to the uneven ground.

One path is the parallel path of verse. In verse, we know that the metre does something to the words, even though the metre be the most rigidly prescribed arrangement of syllables. We know also that the rhythm does something to the metre and to the words, something not the same thing but related. Beyond that we know that the metre and rhythm and words do something to both the intellectual structure and the moral perception of the poem. We understand all this because we appreciate the strains separately as well as feel them together: we know that by their joint operation something has been brought into the poem, which is vital to it, and which would otherwise not be

there. What we ought to know is that something comparable to this is true of the novel and we should suspect that we need training in appreciation to recognize it: training so that we may see not only what the author consciously intended but also where he struck on something over and above, or other than, what he intended. We must understand that the poetic mind is as much at work in prose as in verse, and we must understand that nobody — not even Dante, not even James Joyce — can be conscious of, or deliberately take care of, all the skills he uses in the moment of composition. The nine muses may be conscious, but they are too many to hear at once. The poor poet — the poor novelist — must be contented to hear what he can, yet must act with the pressure and power of the others in his writing fingers — the pressure and the power he can feel conscious of only as a haunt that has just left him.

No wonder then, if such is his case, he will confuse what he does know and can hear with what he does not know and cannot hear: a confusion sometimes made with great effect. Half the English poets of the 17th century thought that if technical mastery of the heroic couplet could be had, then the English epic might be written, when the fact was that the deep form — the underlying classic form — of *Paradise Lost,* not written in couplets at all, heroic or homely, had solved the problem of the epic for Milton: had solved the problem of what new phase of being the epic of Homer, Virgil, Dante had reached in Protestant, Christian, 17th century England. Other powers, other skills of mind and sensibility had entered into the struggle than the poets knew; yet for all we know the argument over metrical form was the efficient agent for the birth of the new deep form. That there have been no Miltons since, counts nothing; there have been no Dantes since Dante; nor should we want any. It is only the path we want to follow.

If the argument about the heroic couplet helped produce Milton, and if the argument about the 'very language of men' helped produce Wordsworth, and if the argument about the 'heightened form of the best conversation of the time' helped produce Eliot and Yeats — all these along with a good many confusions and ignorances as to what else helped — then I think we might strike it rich for the field of the modern novel if we look at one of the most confused, most arrogant, and most fertile statements ever made — among so many — by Henry James. The statement is often quoted, and it comes in the preface he wrote to the revised version of *The Tragic Muse.* I sug-

gest that it is there precisely because at the moment of writing James was prodded — his writing fingers were twisted — by the very muses of deep form that he was only hauntedly aware of. Since he was criticising, not creating, his response was irritated.

The Tragic Muse, I may say, seems to me a failure as a Henry James novel precisely because its form is so nearly only executive form, and not, as James partly allowed, because he did not give the executive form warrant enough to remake the characters. I take this as the unconscious source of James' irritation in the following remarks. "A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is moreover not composed at all unless the painter knows *how* that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably, as 'The Newcomes' has life, as 'Les Trois Mousquetaires', as Tolstoi's 'Peace and War', have it; but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean?* We have heard it maintained, we will remember, that such things are 'superior to art'; but we understand least of all what *that* may mean, and we look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius, who will come to our aid and tell us. There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from 'counting', I delight in a deep-breathing economy of an organic form."

It is curious that James should have reversed the order of words in Tolstoi's *War and Peace,* and if we had time when we got done asking what the whole passage stands for we might ask what that reversal stood for. In brief I think it stood for not having read the book, if at all, with good will — for having read it with a kind of rudderless attention. The important thing is that *War and Peace* does have every quality James here prescribes: composition, premeditation, deep-breathing economy and organic form, but has them in a different relation to executive form than any James would accept. Indeed, put beside *War and Peace, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove,* and *The Golden Bowl* are themselves 'large loose baggy monsters' precisely because an excess use was made of James' particular development of executive form, and precisely because, too, of the consequent presence of James' own brand of the accidental and the arbitrary, and because these together make access difficult to James' own 'deep-breathing economy and organic form.' It is these last, however, that hold us to James as they hold us to Tolstoi, and it is in them that we must find the 'principle of health and safety' — or of deep ill and final danger — which

James found in consciously practiced executive form; just as we would have to show in Tolstoi that his practice was virtually tantamount to an admirable executive form, and must indeed have been so used by Tolstoi. In James we have to deepen the level of our interest in the creative process; in Tolstoi we have to show that the deep things of the mind and the sensibility must after all, when they become literature, be exercised as a game, in the delight of the mind's play, like waterlights, upon its experience. It is true that Tolstoi, in a worse case than Chaucer, denied any worth to his novels compared to life; and it is true that James insisted that literature stood for everything worth living in a free life: he was himself he said that obstinate finality, the artist. But we can afford the excesses of the great — though we must counter with our own smaller excesses of enquiry to which the great were not committed. The 'divine explanatory genius' will never appear to tell us why Tolstoi — let alone Dumas and Thackeray — is 'superior to art', but it seems to me possible for a talent not divine at all to suggest why both Tolstoi and James made superior forms of art. Here our business is with James; and all we have to keep in mind of Tolstoi — of Cervantes, of Dostoevsky, of Balzac and Flaubert, of Fielding, Smollett, and Scott — is that on the evidence of endurance and recurrence of interest, on the evidence of the always available and availing feeling of stature, such work must have in every significant sense at least its necessary share of 'deep-breathing economy' and 'organic form.' We must assume that if we asked we might find out indications of how that principle worked and we can be certain that we could find in such work what James meant by the principle of composition — which is what is here meant by executive form. The novel has changed, since Cervantes, and has taken on different aspects of the general burden of literature according to the phase of culture and the bent of the writer, but I doubt that since, with Cervantes, it first undertook a major expressive task, it has reached any greater degree of mastery or perfection or possible scope. It is only the criticism of the novel, not formerly needed, that has yet to reach mastery — a lack here sorely felt; and a lack you will feel for yourselves if you will think of the relatively much greater maturity of the criticism of poetry. To go on with the present job requires the assumption of a critical maturity we do not have in fact and which we do in fact need if we are to make full response to the novel.

This is not to say that James needed in fact or in any other way to ask our critical questions or any others than he chose to ask. For a

man concerned with consciousness and conscience, and perhaps because of the supremacy of that concern, James had singularly little need of consciousness outside his chosen perspective of vision, and almost no need at all of conscience — in the sense of knowing things together, with or without remorse — in regard to anything but the conventional and technical aspects of his work. But even if he had been as conscious as an oyster of his pearl, or had he had the conscience of a saint over his last sin, he had as an artist only the need to ask those questions of which he needed the answers in order to look workmanlike at his work. If those answers came then the questions must have stood for everything that counted.

It is different with us; we are not at work, we are using work done; and we have a right curiosity to understand what his questions stood for in the dark as well as what they asked for in the open of daily practice. We know, in a way that no individual novelist thinking of his own work can know, that the novel is all of a piece, and that if examples have not the same end in view, they have likely the same source, analogous means, and a common fate. Thus we have to ask at once how it is that the three novels *The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove,* and *The Golden Bowl* should be at the same time modelled on the well-made social play, exercises in the indirect perception of human character and action, direct to the point of the intolerable expressions of the general human predicament, and, finally, symbolic patterns — themselves in their own action — of the permanent struggle between the human condition and human aspirations; how it is, in short, that the most conventional, the most abstract, approach possible should yet exemplify one of the closest scrutinies — the closest forms — ever made of life itself. We have the shudder of beauty — of the many reduced to one, as Pythagoras says; we have the shudder of beauty — the condition of more than usual emotion and more than usual order — as Coleridge says; we have the shudder of beauty — in a unity of response felt as achieved without any feeling that the substance unified has been cheated in the theoretic form in which the unity is expressed. This is the praise of the late novels of Henry James. It may be we cannot say how it happened; if we can possibly say merely *what* happened we shall have made the judgment to go with the praise.

You will remember the well-made play-like structure of these novels — one of the ways in which they differ from all other novels of similar stature. In *The Ambassadors* the hero, Lambert Strether, is sent to Paris by a widow with whom he has 'prospects,' to rescue

her son from an immoral life. Once in Paris, Strether has a classic recognition: Europe is not immoral, it is life itself, and the widow's morality is blatant and empty. Then follows a reversal of roles, equally classic with the recognition: the young man insists on giving up his mistress, who is a great lady, and returning, a cad for riches and a glutton for money, to his mother's America, while, on the contrary, Strether, having discovered life at last in Paris in middle age insists on remaining at the cost of his 'prospects' with the widow, and at the worse cost of all security in life. As he has made his recognition and achieved his reversal too late in life the denouement is that he has to renounce all that has come his way in the person of Maria Gostrey, the American expatriate who picked him up at the moment of landing. Thus Strether turns out to have been less an ambassador than a pilgrim: the goods he has achieved are spiritual, to be signified best by the badge of a new face, even a new look in the shoulders seen from behind.

In *The Wings of the Dove,* an American millionairess, Milly Theale, doomed to early death, makes her pilgrimage to Europe to see and live the most she can before she dies. She falls in with an engaged couple who cannot marry for lack of money; they — particularly the girl, Kate Croy — conceive the idea of marrying the young man to Milly Theale so that after inheriting her money at her death they can marry into power and ease. Milly's pilgrimage is broken by her recognition, which is forced upon her, of the plot to get her money in the disguise of love. She dismisses the young man, dies, but leaves him her money nevertheless. The young man, recognizing what he has done in terms of Milly Theale, suffers if not a reversal a deep change of role and finds himself compelled, like Strether, to renounce the worldly goods he has gained. He is left seeing things with new eyes forever.

In *The Golden Bowl* there is a similar but more complex predicament. Adam Verver, a multi-millionaire, and his daughter Maggie make their pilgrimage to Europe innocent as lambs in their riches and their love of each other. Maggie marries Prince Amerigo who requires money and power to preserve himself. Her father marries the Prince's 'true love', the American expatriate Charlotte Stant, who requires to preserve herself with money and — not power — but further relations with the prince. In due time — in the second act — Maggie discovers that her husband and her step-mother have been improving and expanding their relations. After her recognition scene, in what might be called the third act, she too reverses her role; out of her

changed goodness and innocence — no less good and no less changed —she draws the power to make something tragically good and ultimately innocent of the two marriages. The sacrifice that she makes is that she renounces the old ground of her beseeching — the aspiration of her innocence, candor, and energy, the innocence of her money — and stands on the new and terrible ground of the conditions of life itself.

It is interesting to observe — and I think it can equally be observed of most great European novels — that the Aristotelian terms recognition and reversal of roles apply sharply to the major motions of the plot and that complication or intrigue applies firmly to the minor motions. But instead of the journey of *hubris* or overweening pride, we have the journey of the pilgrim, the searcher, the finder. And instead of katharsis — the purging in pity and terror — we follow rather the Christian pattern of re-birth, the fresh start, the change of life or heart — arising from the pity and terror of human conditions met and seen — with the end not in death but in the living analogue of death, sacrifice and renunciation. So it is in James; and so it is in Tolstoi with the difference that sacrifice may take the form of death as with Anna in *Anna Karenina,* subsidence into the run of things as with Levin in that book or with Pierre in *War and Peace,* or disappearance into the heroic unknown as with Vronsky in *Anna Karenina.* In James the end is always a heightened awareness amounting to an exemplary conscience for life itself, accomplished by the expense, the sacrifice, the renunciation of life as lived in the very conditions on which the consciousness and the conscience are meant to prevail. James' novels leave us with the terrible exemplars of conscience seen coping with the worst excruciations of which their consciousnesses are capable. The order in the three late novels is interesting, and it is the order of composition if not of publication. Strether, in *The Ambassadors,* is the exemplar of the life of senses. Kate Croy, in *The Wings of the Dove,* is our lady of philosophy or practical wisdom shown as the exemplar of all that is torn and dismayed, but still persistent in that role. Maggie Verver, in *The Golden Bowl,* is perhaps as near the exemplar as James could come to our lady of theology or divine wisdom; she is James' creation nearest to Dante's Beatrice, stern and full of charity, the rock itself but all compassion, in the end knowing all but absorbing all she knows into her predetermined self, not exactly lovable but herself love. Not that James would have admitted any of these conceptions except the first.

For in the first, which is Strether as the life of senses, that is exactly

what James' own language shows: Strether's consciousness and his conscience are applied to render an indirect view of the beauty and the excruciation of the life of the senses: he assents to it, he knows it, but he is only an exemplar of knowledge and assent: he himself is not finally up to that life. This James clearly must have meant. But what he meant by Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove* must remain uncertain and I think ought to remain uncertain. Kate as construed from the notes James left behind, notes which may be read in Matthiessen and Murdock's book, was meant originally to be the villainess in a standard social melodrama, and she never entirely loses that role — which explains both her resoluteness and her strange, occasional overriding blind commitment to action. But it explains neither her beauty — she is physically the most beautiful of all James' women by a surpassing margin — nor her instructed humanity, her sense of what is what, and the necessity, in the given conditions, of her fall from that beauty and that humanity. Somehow Kate the beauty, the girl on the make who will be nothing if she makes nothing of what other people are, somehow Kate is the destructive persistent element of practical philosophy which criticises, and places, and makes intelligible, and disposes of the overweening image of moral beauty which is Milly Theale, princess in her own American right and heiress of the ages. Kate is criticism which does not destroy but modulates: under her impact we see the nominal heroine of the novel, Milly Theale, for what she is, an aspiration impossible of realization; she is that temptation seen on the high places which is the worst temptation, once seen the most corrupting, appealing with the best impossible appeal to the worst in our natures. That is not what a man wants to do with his image of moral beauty, but is it what the imaginative man, when he sees his image in terms of the actual conditions of life, sometimes must in honesty do. The wings of the dove are still clean and silvery, but the sheepfold is fouler than ever; for the dove has created its dirt.

Maggie Verver as Beatrice — the Queen or at least the Princess of all forms of knowledge walking in human flesh — is perhaps a more tremendous image than James could quite create. It is hard to turn a lamb into a sovereign even among the lions — even, that is, among those predatory creatures of necessity who are best equipped to know that the lamb of innocence exists. That is why, no doubt, James gives Maggie and her father the added strength of their limitless millions: making the godly surrogates of Caesar. The possibility is haunting, and breathless, that such a combination might be effective;

but it is not enough, for on some other level of belief — the level Dante and Shakespeare had — the conviction of unity is lacking. Maggie has the kind of imperiousness that goes with the deepest waywardness, the waywardness that is the movement of life itself; but she has no capacity for exerting the imperium itself except in aspiration. There is too much fear in her: she feels too much of her new knowledge as chill; she is too much there to be preyed on; she is too much an ideal ever to take on full power. But she does a great deal just the same; if by her goodness and innocence she cannot make other people good, she can yet by that goodness breed their wrong. By her goodness she is able to put her husband and his mistress (who is also her step-mother) between Scylla and Charybdis: between 'the danger of doing too much and the danger of not having any longer the confidence or the nerve . . . to do enough.' And that, she says, 'that's how I make them do what I like.' When her confidante Mrs. Assingham tells her, after hearing this, that she is amazing, that she is terrible, Maggie makes her great answer. No, she says; she can bear anything for love, not for love of her father, not for love of her husband, just for love. What we see is Maggie learning in the abyss of a London stage drawing-room two of the lessons Dostoevsky found in the enormous abyss of *The Brothers Karamazov:* that most men find beauty in Sodom and that love in action is a harsh and terrible thing. But Maggie can accept neither the beauty of Sodom nor the action in love. Thus Mrs. Assingham is right when she tells her husband 'we shall have to lie for her till we're black in the face.' Her goodness and her love is all of a piece; the broken golden bowl which she can barely hold together with all her force is herself; it is flawless only to those who would protect her and defraud her, who would at once plunder and deceive her, all in the name of love and admiration of her goodness.

Maggie is all of a piece in another sense as well. When early in the book Mrs. Assingham tells the Prince — that image of Old Europe, the Italy of life and crime — that he has all the senses that make a man good, he answers her, answers Maggie, answers the reader whoever he may be; answers in an image which is a major strain in the underlying moving form of the book. No, he says, the moral sense I have not got. "I mean always as you others consider it. I've of course something that our poor dear backward old Rome sufficiently passes for it. But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase — half-ruined into the bargain! — in some castle of our *quattrocento* is like the 'lightning elevator' in one of Mr. Verver's fifteen-storey

buildings. Your moral sense works by steam — it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that — well, that it's as short in almost any case to turn round and come down again." Maggie and Milly, and Strether too, work by the terrible amazing steam of their own innocence and candor and courage. They go up like rockets and somehow work great havoc on those who are led, or forced, to go up with them.

In the havoc as it moves and shapes and heaves is the underlying form of the book: the form in which is apprehended the conditions of life. The strongest shape and the sharpest motion — the deepest heaving qualm — James is able to create out of that havoc is the shaping in heaving motion of a conscience out of consciousness. The structure and the gradual emergence of that conscience seem to me the overt and visible acknowledgement of the underlying form. Conscience is the bite of things known together, in remorse and in incentive; conscience is that unification of the sense of things which is moral beauty; conscience comes at many moments but especially, in James, in those deeply arrested moments when the will is united with the imagination in withdrawal.

It is on such moments that each of our three novels ends. In *The Golden Bowl* the Prince tells Maggie "I see nothing but you." That means he is united with his conscience. "And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lifted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast." The moment was gone. At the end of *The Wings of the Dove* our lady of philosophy Kate Croy and her lover Merton Densher feel stretch over them the dove's wings of the dead Milly Theale. "She turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. 'We shall never again be as we were.'" Beauty and a shade had passed between.

So it was too with Strether in *The Ambassadors* and there are thoughts in his mind towards the end of that book, applied to the wonderful mistress of the caddish young man he had come to Paris to rescue, but fitting exactly the situation in other books as well. "It was actually moreover as if he didn't think of her at all, as if he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed." These were the powers the image of moral beauty — of conscience — had attempted to transform. It is the perennial job of uprooted imagination, of conscience, choosing from beauty and knowledge, to raise such an image; but it may not transgress actuality without destruction; the images must not be mistaken for reality though the heart craves it. As Dante

says (Purg. XXI-133-36):

Or puoi la quantitate comprender dell'amar ch'a te mi scalda, quando dismento nostra vanitate, trattando l'ombre come cosa salda	Now may you comprehend the measure of the love that warms me toward you, when I forget our nothingness, and treat images as solid things.

The poor shade of the poet Statius had tried to embrace Virgil, and these were Virgil's words in answer. There the shadow was the only actual. It is interesting to use an insight from Dante here, because in his construction of conscience and moral beauty, James is himself making a late gesture in the aesthetic-moral tradition of the Christian world which Dante did so much to bring into poetry. With both men, it was only a hair's breadth, a mere change of phase, between the spiritual and the sensual, the ideal and the actual; and this is because there was in them both the overwhelming presence of felt, of aesthetic, reality as it fastened like a grapple upon individual souls and bodies.

Also to think of Dante here may remind us again of the great intellectual spiritual form in which James worked: the form of conversion, re-birth, the new life. That is the experience of Strether seen against the actual world, and in that world — "in the strict human order." Not a tragedy in the old sense — that is in its end — its tragedy lies in its centre: in the conditions of life which no conversion, no rebirth, no turning, ever leaves behind — not even in saints till they have gone to heaven. The tragic tension lies partly between what is re-born and what is left over, and partly between the extremes towards which conversion always runs and the reality which contains the extremes.

The extremes with which Henry James was obsessed had largely to do with the personal human relations and almost nothing at all to do with public relations except as they conditioned, marred, or made private relations. It may be said that James wooed into being — by seeing what was there and then going on to create what might be there in consciousness and conscience — a whole territory of human relations hitherto untouched or unarticulated. I do not say not experienced, only unarticulated. So excessive is this reach into relation, there is no escape possible for the creatures caught in it except by a deepening or thickening of that relation until, since it cannot be kept up, it must be sacrificed. That is to say, its ideal force becomes so great that its mere actual shade becomes intolerable. So it was with Strether; he

denied Marie de Vionnet and Maria Gostrey wholly in order to be 'right' with the ideal which the actual experience of them had elicited in his mind. But the denial was a gesture of this ideal, and it could have been otherwise, could in another soul have been the gesture of assent; for the beauty and the knowledge were still there, and the reality, which contains both the ideal and the actual, and so much more, stands, in its immensity, behind.

Behind is a good place. If we think of what is behind, and feel what we think, which is what James did, we will understand all the better the desperation out of which Strether created his image of moral beauty, the virtuous connection, and how it stood up, no matter what, as conscience. Otherwise, like Strether at his low point, we "mightn't see anyone any more at all." As it is we see with Maria Gostrey: "It isn't so much your *being* 'right' — it's your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so."

We have gotten, as we meant to, rather far away from the mere executive form — gotten into what that form merely articulates and joints and manipulates and takes into itself, itself being charged and modified thereby; but it has been there all along, that form, and we can now look at at least one facet of it with double vision: to see what it is and to see at the same time what happens to it — like what happens to a metre — in use. There are many possibilities — all those executive habits of the artist James names in his prefaces, some of them never named before; and all those other devices, rhetorical and imagistic which James uses without naming — but for my purpose, which is to show how a technical device criticises the substance it puts in motion and how the substance modifies the device, there is none so handy or so apt as James' use of the conventional figure of the confidante, a figure common to European drama, but developed to the highest degree of conventionality in the French Theatre James knew best.

Each of the three novels has examples, and in each the uses to which they are put are somewhat different. In the theatre the confidante is used to let the audience know what it otherwise would not; she blurts out secrets; carries messages; cites facts; acts like a chorus; and is otherwise generally employed for comic relief or to represent the passage of time. Generally speaking, the confidante is stupid, or has the kind of brightness that goes with gossip, cunning, and malice. In these three novels the case is different: each confidante has a kind of bottom or residual human stupidity and each is everlastingly given to gossip; but the gossip has a creative purpose — to add substance to the

story — and the stupidity is there to give slowness and weight and alternative forms to the perceptions and responses which they create. This is the gossiping stupidity for which there is no name in any living language, but which the Sanscrit calls Moha, the vital, fundamental stupidity of the human race by which it represents, to the human view, the cow, or as we would say the sheep. It is what the man has been caught in when he gives you a sheepish look; he was caught a little short of the possibility he was trying to cope with. It is this role — so much more fundamental than the conventional original — that James' confidante is given to play; and saying so much it should be evident that she will qualify as well as report action, she will give it substance, and gain substance by it, as well as precipitate it.

The simplest form of confidante in our three novels is that taken by Susan Stringham in *The Wings of the Dove*. Susie is Milly Theale's paid companion; it is she who makes out of Milly a Princess and over-declares her value, volubly and credibly, until there is a general conspiracy to accept as operative truth the ideal she puts up: she gives human and fabulous names — a fairy-godmother sort of name — to the attributes in Milly which James could not at first directly present; but she is not otherwise a part of the story. In *The Golden Bowl* Fanny Assingham and her husband Colonel Bob have nothing at all of the fairy god-parent about them, but have rather just the opposite function: to make the most intolerable, grasping, greedy, predatory behaviour socially and humanly acceptable at the same time that they make out between them that the behaviour *is* predatory and *is* intolerable. They fulfill in short the old role of truth-telling, lie-making clowns at the drawing-room level. They are the comic relief, but it is a curiously ugly, unredeemable sort of penetrating, revelatory comedy that they practice. Fanny with a refinement of perception — wrong or right — past belief and with an only barely credible polish of diction, and Colonel Bob with the good-hearted cynicism appropriate to the best clubs, dig into the tenderest perfidy and the most charitable frauds they can find, and when they cannot find they create. These are the people, wonderfully rendered in voice and gesture and texture of situation, who stand for all the intrigue that passes for human motive before human motive is created. Colonel Bob assumes that any such substitute will pass muster if let alone; by such as him, the world would get by. Fanny makes a very different but congruous assumption: that no motive inspected — and inspect them she must— could ever get by unless inspected, protected, edited, rearranged, and covered up. Her great sign of the truth is that it shall be worth lying

for; and her great warrant for lying is that a lie may create a truth. To her, a mistake only proves her policy right, and a real blunder only asks for redoubled effort. It is people like the Assinghams that ensure the service of the gods of this world; they are that rhetoric of manners that masquerades as decency to cover the plea of guilty or inadequate action. They create the scandal they would excuse. What they make in the world is hopelessness, futility, emptiness; but they make these tolerable by making them a game, yet without them nobody could get along, least of all the Ververs, Charlotte, and the Prince, the truly innocent and the truly wicked, for without the Assinghams they would have no meeting ground.

Maria Gostrey, in *The Ambassadors,* shares the gossip and the creativeness of the Assinghams, but with the difference that she is the go-between who has something in common with both things she goes between, and that her creativeness is not a substitute and seldom a mistake, for she is, rather, when she pushes herself, clairvoyant. That she pushes herself often makes her a part of the story and part of the emotion that holds the story together. The gift of clairvoyance, the gift of seeing so into the centre of things as to become a part of them, and of doing so merely by nature and the skill of a lifetime, gives her powers quite opposite to those of the Assinghams. Instead of hopelessness she creates hope, instead of futility possible use, instead of emptiness fullness; and she never makes tolerable that which ought to remain intolerable. That is why she becomes, in the deep sense, a part of the story, and why the story lifts her from a means to a substance. If it were not that a device ought not to be called so, I would say that this instance of the conventional device of the confidante was also an instance of classic form.

There remains the middle ground of what is nowadays called the mind or the intellect to enquire into: the conceptual, dogmatic, tendentious part of the whole mind: the part inhabited and made frantic by one's ideology. Although there has been a good deal of talk to the effect that James was defective in this quarter, I think all that talk will vaporize on the instant if the question underlying the talk is differently put. Not what ideas did James have, but with what ideas — abroad then and now — is James' imaginative response to life related? It will be these ideas that will illuminate and partake of his underlying form. In short we want to get at the ideas in James' mind that were related to his whole work; and in James these occupy a precarious but precious place. He is not a Dante or a Thomas Mann; his humanism is under cover, part of his way of seeing,

part of his 'deep-breathing economy of organic form.'

But it had got twisted by his time and by the superstitions of his time; for although he was 'against' his time he had necessarily to collaborate with it — from the very honesty of his inward eye for the actual, no one more so. I do not know that the nature of this collaboration can be made plain, but a few generalizations may be risked. They have to do with the tendency towards expressionism in art and social thinking, which stem from what is meant by art for art's sake, and they have to do with the emergence of a new concept of the individual as isolated and detached from society in everything but responsiveness, which is a concept that springs, I think, from those changes in society that are related to the facts of population growth and the mass-form of society.

There is a sense in which art for art's sake as we have had it since the *Parnassiens* is itself a reflection of the shift in the bases and the growth in size of any given modern society. As the bourgeois base turns into the industrial base — as the great population engulfs the 'great society' — we get on the one hand something called pure poetry with a set of feelings in the poets who write it which has something to do with the impulse to escape (to deny, to cut away) and the conviction of isolation (the condition of the incommunicable, the purely expressive, the fatally private — the sense of operating at a self-created parallel to the new society). At the same time, on the other hand, we get a belief in that monster the pure individual, whose impulse is to take life as a game, and whose ambition is to make the individual *feeling* of life the supreme heroism; so that the tropes of one's own mind become the only real parallel to life. In both cases — in pure art and in the pure individual — we pretend that it was like this in the past just behind our past.

No doubt this is so of some past, but not where it is looked for, in the Great Europe. It is more likely so in some of the over-populated periods in Egyptian or Byzantine history, or in the Rome of the second century: each of which ended in the culture of the fellaheen, where the individual was purified to extinction, from which only Rome has so far recovered. What we overlook in our pretence to a tradition is the difference between a population-burst accompanied by the disappearance of knowledge and the shrinking of the means of subsistence, which is what the past shows us (Egypt, China, India, Rome) and a great continuing population growth accompanied by the division of culture and the specialization of knowledge, along with the tremendous multiplication of the means of subsistence and of war — all

of which has been our experience. What we see is the disappearance of the old establishment of culture — culture safe from the ravages of economy — and we do not know whether another culture is emerging from the massive dark, or, if it is, whether we like it. Whatever has disappeared or is emerging is doing so without loss of vitality except in the cultural establishment (now everywhere a prey to the economy) and with otherwise what seems a gain in vitality. What has above all survived in our new mass society is the sense of the pure individual — by himself, or herself, heir to all the ages. Because of the loss of the cultural establishment we have put a tremendous burden on the pure individual consciousness. It seems to us that in order to hang on to the pure individual we must burden his consciousness beyond any previous known measure. We make him in our art, especially the art of literature, assume the weight of the whole cultural establishment — above all that part of it which has to do with behaviour, manners, human relations: with insight, with conformity and rebellion, and with the creation or ability to create absorbing human motives. For all this the artist has to find, by instinct since his culture does not sufficiently help him, what I called to begin with the underlying classic form in which things are held together in a living way, with the sense of life going on.

Sometimes this burden of consciousness seems to obscure, if not to replace, the individuals we create, whether in ourselves or in our arts. At any rate, this burden of consciousness is what has happened to our culture. There is no longer any establishment, no longer any formula, and we like to say only vestigial forms, to call on outside ourselves. There is only the succession of created consciousnesses — each of which is an attempt to incorporate, to give body to, to incarnate so much as it is possible to experience, to feel it, the life of the times, including the culture no matter what has happened to it — and including also of course all those other things which never were in any culture, but which press on us just the same.

These generalizations seem to me one of the useful backgrounds against which to look at the novels of Henry James. As background it reflects light on the extremes to which he pushed the limits of his created individual consciousnesses, so much less varied than those of Gide, Proust, Mann, Kafka, and Joyce, but no less intense, no less desperately grasping after life, and the form of life, for and in the name of the individual. In that light we can but understand what Strether, in *The Ambassadors,* is up to when he says *Live all you can!* We can understand also how Mme de Vionnet, the young man's

splendid mistress, is up to the same thing under what are fundamentally the same conditions. We understand how much there is to see — to see unaided by ourselves — how much there is to intensify into form — in the simplest relation between human beings.

James at 58, when he wrote *The Ambassadors,* had experienced and therefore could dramatize the disestablishment of culture and the shift in the bases of society, and he could do so all the better because he did not, and probably could not, have understood them intellectually or historically. He was concerned with the actuality he found and with the forms under the actuality. He was himself an example of disestablishment and a forerunner of what we may expect to find a prevalent form of disinherited sensibility, the new 'intellectual proletariat', and he had therefore only to write out of himself against the society which 'intellectually' or by common assumption he thought still existed, in order to create an extreme type of transitional image of the future time. Not unnaturally his original audience — barring the young who were ahead of themselves — thought he had created sterile fantasies; the richer his subjects grew and the deeper he got into them, the more his sales fell off. His own experience of 'America' and of 'Europe', where America had apparently moved faster than Europe towards the mass society, towards the disinheritance but not the disappearance of the individual, had moved him ahead of his contemporaries; had moved him to the 1930's when he began to be read seriously, and the 40's when he got to be the rage, and now to the 50's when he seems, so to speak, an exaggerated and highly sensitised form of the commonplace of our experience: the sensitised deep form.

If Strether is our example of 1902 looking ahead, what Strether would feel now would seem like the music of Adrian Leverkühn in Mann's *Doctor Faustus:* a heightening but not a disintegration of his feelings of 1902; and it would be a heightening, as in Mann's novel, by parody and critique, because like Leverkühn he would have had so much more of the same thing behind him, and so much more of the same burden put upon him, than he had in the earlier time. Our theoretic new Strether would have found out how much more had to be re-established in a form greater than its own than he had then felt; how much more, by necessity and by choice, must be reborn into actuality out of its hidden form. But the difference between the two Strethers would be by bulk and by kind, not by quality, by scope and not by reach. The reach is into the dark places where the Muses are, and all the rest is the work we do to bring into the performance of our own language the underlying classic form in which they speak.

LEONARD CASPER:

Movement Toward a Close

I. Inception

Jittered in hotbed, the pendulum of brass-seed
is set in motion. A wind a wheel within
a wind; a flare on the surface of the sun
which has no surface. Now, Porter, begin.

For the first time, a foot inside a door;
then handed a bill-of-goods and told to sell.
Tourist rooms with the almost-maniac smell
of ammonia; barroom tan; winking dogs.

"Friend, you never know what it's like until
you've tried it." Glad-hands above the slopjar;
rocker-voices on a porch. — Think
of concern, in a hotbed turnover when wind is still!

(Man of the world, we burn in your effigy.)
Scratch a man who itches, and you'll find
Porter! cup-bearer to Sangreal and Son.
(Man of a thousand trades, we are your pedigree.)

— Think what association means *(Think!*
is a plywood slogan from the office head),
with marginal men who win their daily bread
by economy of inquiry and guarantee;

met in a winecellar of winds, with badly mixed
couples, looking ambidextrous
and sinister in medicine hats and spouting
windjammer words of ads (Think!) ventuous.

II. Involvement

Night-flight through darkness seen edgewise,
driving back to trailer that's become his home
in this new territory.

Slumbering engine (late trade-in model)
coaxes; he becomes impelled by the ply of tires,
an elegy for the memory.

Like wind passing through wind, the groundswell
scoops him forward, as to deep layers of sleep . . .
Buyers don't exist anyway:
this is the meaning of meaning, this fast road,
unsunned, unmuddied, lonely before a weekend
without landmarks to gainsay . . .

Singing, "Beyond the blue phenomena",
while the concrete-strips redistribute, and
secondhand time sweeps
around and around like obsessive tires
pressing the roadway flat as a process,
and the forward curve grows steep.

Maps say: it's no farther from the center
of the forest out than in, except
that meanwhile rivers flow
the world slips east, and things have happened:
there's no rate of exchange for *that* — unless
you forget stopping and start to *go!*

III. Fulfillment

Like naked light bulbs, thoughts
arouse him from the black of bed.
Crows' feet walk across his head
in wonder. His hurried hand is caught
in the sticky field of a strange woman,
his wife, now his bed companion
only, her bedspring voice distraught.

From the edge of silence, a voice
that sets an edge on silence cries
through a luminous clock. It pries
him alert. (The wind within had a choice
to write or not a "Manifesto, Should the Day
Ever Come".) But he knows only the way
to think, "It is time: O rise and rejoice!"

JAMES SCHUYLER:

A Memory Haunts Me

Certain haunting figures, certain people at certain moments, what they look like, and their mystery, say the solitary descender from the train at a small unpeopled junction, alone and his valise, the train is fading, is gone away, just him and the surround him flatness of the all perspective landscape, a man with a valise walks off into infinity; or say, a woman, what a woman thinks of while she's washing dishes, this woman with the ingrown eyes. The porcelain white ceiling light and smell of powdered soap, plates she lifts from the opaque silver-sudsy water and racks with her puffed slippery firm-gripping fingers, in a repetition of a gesture memorized so long ago. It's not the best china she's washing, the daily duty ware, white with a creamyellow border touched with pink pustule rosebuds, and the scratched daily silverplate, and the pans, greasy cold or vegetable water smelling, wait on the black and white still warm stove. Say her cheeks are unresilient as a withered apple, her lips purplish-pale, her nostrils etched with eczema, her bosom full, flaccid, pendent.

She is thinking of a long time ago, she sees with girlhood eyes again. She and her uncle in the buckboard as they approached the railway crossing, a train tracking to a right-angle stop across their road and her uncle not one to race a train, they pull up and the train stops across their road and starts in a gathering of speed and backward flying cinders, black smoke uncoiled and curling at its side like the Cherry Sisters' undone luxury of hair, the train-screen pulled aside like a curtain raised, there is a man. He is wearing a dark suit, a hat square on his head, he carries an oblong valise and nothing else, it is summer on the plains and long ago.

And there then for her the landscape composed about him, as though from him ran in infinite radiation thin lines of mathematical exactness marking and defining the mystery of a flat mountainless (its sadness, its sweetness) farmland. Before the horse lifted hooves and set the buckboard rolling towards the stranger, the stranger in his aloneness lifted one foot and then the other, with a courage that made her tremble he walked off towards infinity. Then of course the buckboard rolled rattling across the tracks, hooves clopped, the

stranger turned, her uncle said "Whoa," the stranger climbed up next her saying thanks, she is thinking as she washes dishes, I remember what he looked like, what did I look like to him?

There are photographs which will say what she looked like, even in that same skirt and shirtwaist, the Leghorn straw, but, what did she look like to him? Thirty years later she still feels without admitting it the thrill of coarse cloth and his leg pressed hard on hers, thirty years later she wants to believe that the thrill it gave her could not be read by him in her face, and yet — it's shocking, so young a girl — deliberately she put that thrill in her face for him to read, more deliberate than that, put it there in such a way that this stranger might read it and her uncle not. Born to duplicity . . . or what a family teaches. . . .

The plates and glasses, the table silver, washed, now the ennui of pans: what did I look like to him then? Easy? Desireable? Innocent? Just a girl, a to be flirted with girl? The cause of her unease is this, although through all their ill-starred years of marriage (yes, they married) she ran herself high-handedly, at that one first encounter she showed herself, showed something of herself, that never was on view to him again. She won't admit she showed it, and thirty years later wonders if he saw it.

The pans are washed, the dishpan emptied, the dirty dishwater goes slosh and drains away, the sink is scoured, the dishcloth rinsed and wrung and hung to dry, the dish towels too, turn off the porcelain white light and close the door.

The Mouse Party

The covers were slipping away like a dream. Alfred opened his eyes. The night-light was on in the nursery and at the windows the curtains breathed gently in their sleep. He looked over the edge of the bed: one of his sister Guinevere's white mice was tugging, in a friendly way, at the blanket. Alfred shook his head and pointed to the bed where Guinevere lay, her long hair floating on the pillow. But the mouse looked bright-eyed at Alfred and skittering backwards was gone from the room.

Leaving his empty bed, running barefoot, Alfred followed along the hall to the head of the kitchen stairs. The mouse ran down the bannister and he slid down behind it. *Tic, tic, tic, tic,* the tiny claws

on the cold linoleum, across the kitchen and into the nameless room beyond where the cage of white mice was kept. It was dark in the cage, but Alfred could see a rummage of white and hear the whisk and slither of tails. In they went, and Alfred closed the little door: the cage filled with sunlight, green leaves sprang out of the joints of the bamboo bars, fresh morning grass rose underfoot.

Alfred sat in the center of the lawn and the mice ran in a ring around him, each one holding between its teeth the tail of the mouse ahead. One of the mice, while the others squeaked in chorus, did a kind of dance, switching its tail and trotting rhythmically back and forth. They held a contest to see who could spit the furthest, and Alfred easily won.

Then Alfred sang for them, *Poor Butterfly* and *Some Winter's Night,* he trotted on all fours like a rooting pig, and he purred and meowed like a cat, which made them shudder and hide under the leaves. Over refreshments (tea and carrot-sticks for the mice, buttermilk and Lorna Doones for Alfred) he gave them names: Whiskers, Redeye, Longtail, Whitey and Snapperteeth.

The sunlight waned. It was getting late. Before he left Alfred kissed each mouse and nestled it against his neck. In return they gave him mouse kisses, little nips and nibbles. Then he told what Guinevere had said, that if he picked them up they would scratch him. The mice flickered their tails and their eyes snapped. Alfred said good-bye and slipped out of the cage.

He hooked the little door behind him and without looking back crossed the dawn silent kitchen and climbed the stairs. The curtains at the nursery windows were limp and blue with cold. Guinevere's hair had drifted across her face. He crept into bed. Before the covers knew it, Alfred was fast asleep.

The Forty-First and Youngest Brother

In the great room under the gabled roof, its windows open to the star-pierced winter sky, his forty brothers (not brothers in bond of blood or love, but in bond of vow and fate) slept each on his narrow bed, naked, chaste and warm.

Downstairs, five stories down, he, the forty-first and youngest brother, wistfully polished a blue knife blade. The edge was sharp

between the flange and curving back, but with dust and floss he perfected it. The tendons in his feet stretched and relaxed. His eyes revolved slowly in their sockets. The windows were hung, outside, with black.

The tower bells rang the last quarter of the night. The boy put down the knife and rose from his chair. Of the music of shut books and pools of lamplight he danced the syncopation, his fluttering shoulder blades trapped in his shirt. It was a dance of pleasure, not of prayer, and yet tonight, as always, it invoked his father's ghost.

Dressed as in life, shabby, puffy-eyed, the intangible father could not see his son. Nevertheless, he addressed him, his voice resonant and sweet. "Beware of flowers," he said, and faded in the air.

The boy took the knife in his hand. The knife slit his throat with its stinging blade and flew out of the house. Tenderly, the soles of his feet kissed the rugs good-bye.

Naked at last! He fled the house and skimming the snow-crusted lawn followed the minnowing knives that flashed under street lamps and led him on through night streets of hot creaking houses and out of the town. He raced the knives and faster than they he took the little hill, the bridge, the frozen stream. Unled, he ran for the joy of running. The cold wind whipped him on. A bough cried, "You must crawl on hands and knees," and tore itself from its tree. "I cannot!" he cried, but the wind flung him down.

He crawled, weeping, up the hillside. His tears froze on his face. Shattering snow-crust cut his wrists and knees. A farm dog bayed. The hill was steeper. The stars went out. Cornshocks in barricade. A cow's hot breath on his back. Painfully his throat wound healed. The hill was steeper. Flat on the snow, he dragged himself the final yards by his forehead and elbows.

Blown clean of snow, wind-rippled ice coated the hilltop. He stood with an easy breath. Behind him, night bathed the town, the house and tower, but in front of him, below in the other valley, was the sun, loosening from its snares of sun-stained mist. The sun, the fading sky, the dying night. He knelt and made a brief orison. A truck stared up the hill. What would his brothers say? Sleep stirred in his limbs. He lay down on the ice and crossed his arms on his chest.

Swiftly, the sun's first melting ray bore him, the forty-first and youngest brother, to his bed in the great room under the gabled roof where, naked, chaste and warm, his forty brothers slept.

ARTHUR GREGOR:

Continued Departure

The Two Young Men
The Chorus of Seaman

This takes place at a beach in the very early hours of morning. The only light is that of a fire in the sand below the cliff. Two young men lie stretched out near the fire. One is twenty-two, the other twenty-eight. They have been talking for a long time, so that by now they know a good deal about each other, although one does not yet know who the other is. It gets lighter, and a tent is seen at left. A blanket, a lamp, a water jug, a radio are in front of the tent. The younger (A) gets up. He is tall and is dressed in bathing shorts. He walks into the tent and returns with an album of photographs. He picks up the water jug. The noise of the sea, of waves rushing up against the sand and the cliff, is heard. The older (B) sits up. He is wearing a beach robe.

A *(handing B the jug):* Here.
B: Thank you.
A: Soon it will be light. Soon the sea will be calm. The sea will be green and clear. It will seem shallow.

Think of it, soon it will be light; only a short time ago it was dark.
B: Have you always lived near the sea?
A: Ever since I left home. And you? What about you? Where do you come from, and where are you going?
B: I am rich. I was brought up by men and women paid to bring me up.
A: I saw you arrive at the inn.
B: I saw you walk across the square.
A: I saw your luggage and your two servants and your secretary. The whole village is making tales about you. You must be very important.
B *(drinks some water):* And I saw you carry a basket of flowers at noon when everyone is resting. You must be a dreamer.
A *(resting his face on one hand and making designs in the sand with the other):* I often dance.

B: They say you sell rare flowers. They say you bring them from the sea.
A: I sell flowers. *(He continues with his designs and looks in front of himself.)* Why did you come here?
B: To leave.
A: You came to leave?
B: I came to leave.
A: And you want me to get you a flower from the sea?
B: I want a flower from the sea.
A: And when are you leaving?
B: As soon as the ships are ready. As soon as the radio sounds the horns.
A: And where are you going?
B: I don't know.
A: But your seamen are busy on your ships. You are going somewhere.
B: Somewhere.
A: But you don't know where.
B: I don't know where.
A: And what do you do when you get to wherever you are going?
B: I walk through cities and villages.
A: And?
B: I command my servants to prepare the hunt.
A: Tell me about the hunt.
B: My servants lead on with rope and revolver. They lift up a torch of tar and fire when they spot a lion or a tiger, and I ride ahead. I permit the beast to approach me from the back. However it moves, it believes itself unnoticed. When it is about to thrust itself upon me, I turn. My horse neighs wildly, its mouth full of foam, my servants close in, and the beast, sensing a trap, seeks to withdraw. It is then I fling myself upon it, stab or strangle it,
A: And?
B: rest near a fire, wait a whole night, return to my ships at dawn with blood upon my hands and face, ready to leave pier.

(They are silent for a while and only the sounds of the sea are heard and the occasional noise of static coming over the radio.)

A: Why do you go on hunts?
B: What else is there for the hunted but to hunt themselves?

A: But who hunts you?
B: I have always been hunted.
A: Who hunts you?
B: Not anyone. Something within me; and that is worse. For if you are hunted by a person, you know at least who hunts you. Then it is a feeling of danger that fills you, not fear. But if you are hunted by something within you, you fear. Since it cannot be seen or heard, it can only be felt. And what is more frightening than to fear and not know what it is you fear? And what is more frightening than to be driven and not to know where you are driven, nor what it is that you are driven to?

(It is getting lighter and (A) gets up to dance. As it continues to get lighter and the darkness breaks, he dances now near the fire, now nearer the sea.)

A: No, not yet. It is still not time.

(And as he continues with his dance)

No, not yet. It is still not time.

(He stumbles on the album of photos and picks it up.)

Here, look at the album. Look at my family. Get to know my family.
B *(opens it, looks at the first photo and reads):* Giacomo at four.
A: Giacomo, that is my name.
B: So it is Giacomo.
GIACOMO: Yes.
B: And who is this?
GIACOMO: My mother when she was young. And what is your name?
B: Rudolf. And is she nice?
GIACOMO: Who?
RUDOLF: Your mother.
GIACOMO: Yes, very nice.
RUDOLF: Is she nice to you?
GIACOMO: Oh yes, very.
RUDOLF: Where does she live?
GIACOMO: In a village in the mountains near Spain. And are you from the North?

RUDOLF: She must miss you very much.

GIACOMO: Yes. But my sisters are with her and I go home twice a year.

RUDOLF *(turning a page):* And how old were you then?

GIACOMO: Sixteen. I often climbed these trees.

RUDOLF: And this house?

GIACOMO: Our home. And where is your home? Show me a picture of your home.

RUDOLF: I have no picture of my home. When I was very young I was taken from my mother. I do not remember her. I only remember her screams when I was taken away. I do not know if I cried when I was taken away; I know now I should have dug my teeth into the arms of those who took me. I should have had spices like fire to throw into their eyes.

(He continues to look at the photos.)

And you will get me a flower from the sea?

GIACOMO: Not yet. It is still too dark. Only when it is fully light does all fear leave me. Only then are my limbs loose. Only then can I reach for flowers.

RUDOLF *(has put aside the album):* To know that all fear has left you. To be able to accept what you are given; to be able to take it for what it is and nothing else —

GIACOMO: What else is there? What else is the sea but the sea? What else is the sand but sand?

RUDOLF: Have you ever stood in a garden in front of a pool where a lutist sits with bent head and girls descend bringing lamps and their veils flutter in the wind and you bite into your hand because you are driven to reach out and you throw yourself in the grass to hide your mouth and the lutist plays and the girls sing and there is nothing there. . . .

Have you ever arrived at a port where the homes are surrounded by white walls, the roofs are flat and low, the streets narrow, the bazaar keepers sit as though asleep behind their wares; have you ever landed with the knowledge that each arrival is a continued departure?

You have run from cities that always lie in sun to cities covered with snow; from squares with statues of men and horses to streets lined with shacks where women and children lie on mats. You

hear the sound of flies whirring about lights. And here again as everywhere something in you cries: *No, no, not here, not there, the other was better, the next will be closer, everywhere is better than here.* . . . You go on, cross lands, reach shores and leave them, cross seas. Sometimes the days are clear and the sea is calm; sometimes the sea soars up into cliffs steeper and blacker than those from where in a dream you are about to fall, only now you fall, and the lions carried on the ship for a circus in some distant land are afraid, and you hear them roar.

Have you ever landed after the storm was over, only within you the storm has never ceased?

I walk through the empty streets of a city. I have just arrived. I know I have been here before, I know I must follow the streets, I know what streets to follow, but what follows I do not know. Do we ever, ever know what follows? All homes are surrounded by walls, grapes blue and heavy hang down the walls. Beggars shout, and there behind a gate I see a pool, and from the pool I hear voices; and here, farther down, coming from tents, I hear loud breathing and I hear laughter. And then, around the corner, in a doorway, I see a girl. Her hair is dark, long, loose, her eyes seem vast and silent and in them I hear the voices hidden near pools and I hear the laughter that comes from mats hidden behind tents. And she goes with me and loves me. But is it her I wanted, or the feeling beyond her, the feeling in her eyes, my own yearning, the feeling that lies not in her but in me? Although I am with her night after night, is it her vile demonstrations, her vulgarity I wanted? No, no, I tell you, I did not want her at all. For is it not true we only know what has been taken? What is presented to us, what is given, what may even be ours, we do not know. We see it, but do we know it? Remember, it follows; it has not already been. And does not 'what we may have' become trivial compared to 'what we had'? For the one stands outside us obscured by our own ignorance of it, while the other lives clearly within us by the very fact of our knowledge of it. Each time I must learn again and again, what has been taken can never be returned. And is it not true, is it not true, that by the very fact that we are given — given to life, I mean — something greater is taken, something vast and colorless and silent? And here I am in a room, and here she sits crouched at my feet like a dog waiting to

be whipped. No, I tell you, I detest her presence. For only through what exists do we know what does not exist, only through what we have do we know what cannot be had. And I want to let my belt loose on her until she screams, for she sits there and looks at the floor and does not say a word, and I want almost to kill her, I want to tear off her clothes and whip her until she screams and I scream with her, for her very reality kills me.

(He stands, breathes heavily and says nothing for a while. Giacomo sits near him with lowered head. The noise of static is heard again over the radio mixed with a faint whisper of voices. All at once Rudolf starts up again.)

RUDOLF: Look at me, look at me, master of ships, much-envied traveler, cause of whispers and gossip for those to whom my position, my very distance, presents a mystery, to whom I am a mystery; yet I have nothing. Here I am and know that I have nothing. Here I am and here are you and here as everywhere are objects and everything is real only within itself, and I have none of it. Look, day has come again, yet I have nothing.

(He points to the sun.)

The sun. Giacomo, it is time.

(Giacomo rises slowly.)

GIACOMO: No, no, it is not time. My arms feel heavy. It is strange.

(And now from the radio the sound of ships' horns is heard.)

RUDOLF: It is time, I tell you. Don't you hear the horns? *(He picks up the radio.)* My ships' horns. My seamen are calling.

GIACOMO: The sea is silent and yet I hear a dreadful roar. The sun has come up and yet I feel a terrible darkness. What have you done, traveler? Traveler, what have you done?

(Giacomo retreats slowly, Rudolf follows him.)

RUDOLF: Go, bring me a flower from the sea so I can remember, so I can keep it with all that is left me to remember. Go, and it will be as if you had created it. For only in objects that other

men of yearning have created do I feel wanted: In the statue lying among white ruins of an ancient city; in the painting of a girl sitting on stone, a lion's head, the perspective at a perfect sunset. Go and bring me something beautiful from the sea; go.

GIACOMO: The sea will be dark.

RUDOLF: No, it will be as it always is. Tell me how is the sea.

GIACOMO: It will be dark.

RUDOLF: Tell me how is the sea.

GIACOMO: It has the color of emeralds only it is clearer than any stone. Rocks are clustered with coral, shell, the jewel of snail, and thin, green plants. The fishes are small and flee in hordes. Beads like water frozen to color, blue, violet, deep purple, hang from leaves and plants and fall like pearls among coral, shell and jewel of snail. Behind the rocks among the weeds and plants are flowers. Tall flowers with long, fine leaves that fall back like the long hair of girls combing themselves near a pool.

RUDOLF: Go, get one for me. Hear, *(the horns are heard again)* a second call.

(Giacomo is now on top of the cliff. Rudolf follows him closely.)

GIACOMO: Why do you send me? Why do you follow me? It is not right to go.

RUDOLF: Do not think, go.

(And Giacomo dives into the sea. Rudolf returns to where the fire had been while it was dark. There is nothing there now but a heap of ashes. He picks up the album, looks at it, puts it down again. While he paces up and down the horns of ships are heard again over the radio followed by the Chorus of Seamen.)

CHORUS OF SEAMEN: *The ships are waiting. Again we shall sail.*
From coast to coast we go, yet where we go
we do not know. The coasts are not waiting,
the coasts do not care. . . .
No No
not here
not there, the other was better, the next
will be closer, not here, not there
somewhere.

(And now Giacomo appears. He walks over to the cliff and leans against it. He holds a flower, and now throws it where he stands in the sand. Rudolf looks at it.)

RUDOLF: Broken, dead and broken, broken it lies in the sand, pale and broken, pale as I was when I was broken.

It did not stab you back, did it? It did not wrap its leaves like claws about your wrist until your blood stopped, for you were about to kill it? But no, no, it has no thorns. It lies exposed to terror; born defenseless where defense is needed.

(They stand without moving, Giacomo with head bent, Rudolf pointing at the flower and looking at Giacomo in a gesture of accusation. Again the sounds of the sea are heard. Again the radio announces the Chorus of Seamen.)

CHORUS OF SEAMEN: *The ships are waiting. From coast to coast we go. The coasts are not waiting. The coasts do not care.*

Not here, not there, the other was better, the next will be closer somewhere.

(At the beginning of 'somewhere' which the Chorus repeats on and on, Rudolf has turned abruptly and has left. Giacomo still stands against the cliff and lifts his head slowly. But as he sees that Rudolf has left, he rushes over to the radio and turns it off. And, as now he looks about himself, as he raises his arms and begins again to dance, ...)

Curtain

ALWYN BERLAND:

Violence in the Poetry of Allen Tate

> Duchess: I could curse the stars—
> Bosola: O, fearful.
> Duchess: And those three smiling seasons of the year
> Into a Russian winter; nay, the world
> To its first chaos.
> Bosola: Look you, the stars shine still.
> Duchess: O, but you must
> Remember, my curse hath a great way to go.
> — *The Duchess of Malfi*

It is no accident that Allen Tate has written on John Webster ("Horatian Epode to The Duchess of Malfi"); the wonder is that he has done so only once. For the resemblances between these two are impressive, and illuminating. Both are artists who demonstrate their great consciousness of classical forms and conventions, and both manipulate these conventions for purposes which are ultimately non-classical, and romantic. There is more. Not the matter of source and influence; the obvious fact that Tate has read Webster is meaningless beside the fact that his sensibility, however struggling against his world, responds to it in ways we recognize as those of Webster.

Tate is obsessed by a vision of chaos — of disorder and violence and disintegration. His poetry is filled with a kind of brutal despair, next to which Ransom's poetry seems detached and reasonable, and Eliot's — even "The Waste Land" — discreet and urbane. One must look back to Webster for a comparable poetry. The apocalyptic vision of Webster sees violence and evil as so deeply embedded in the very scheme of things that he surrenders finally the attempt to find the sometime verities of consolation. There is nothing more ironic than the closing lines of *The Duchess of Malfi,* where Delio stands on a stage littered with corpses — the spawn of betrayals, reversals, conspiracies, and says:

> These wretched eminent things
> Leave no more fame behind 'em, than should one
> Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow:
> As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts,
> Both form and matter. I have ever thought
> Nature doth nothing so great for great men

> As when she's pleas'd to make them lords of truth:
> Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
> Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.

The only possible reading of these lines that will preserve the sense of the play is that the claim for "integrity of life" is an apology for the author's own uncompromising vision, that does not allow happy endings.

The single terrible illuminations are what persist in Webster. Ferdinand cries out: "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young"; and Julia, poisoned, departs like a catechumen: "I go, I know not whither"; and the Cardinal says, like a scholiast brooding on a difficult text: "When I look into the fish-ponds in my garden, / Methinks I see a thing arm'd with a rake, / That seems to strike at me." Finally, Bosola moralizes: "Security some men call the suburbs of hell, / Only a dead wall between."

Weigh these with Tate's:

> I thought I heard the dark pounding its head
> On a rock, crying: *Who are the dead?*

and

> When little boys grown patient at last, weary,
> Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night,
> The event will rage terrific as the sea;
> Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light.

or

> A daughter is the fruit of occupations;
> Let her not read history lest knowledge
> Of her fathers instruct her to be a petty bawd.
> Vittoria was herself, the contemporary strumpet
> A plain bitch.

or, once more:

> I am become geometries, and glut
> Expansions like a blind astronomer
> Dazed, while the worldless heavens bulge and reel
> In the cold revery of an idiot.

It is all worth insisting upon. Tate gives a monologue entitled paradoxically "The Meaning of Life," and concludes:

> In killing there is more than commentary.
> One's sense of the proper decoration alters
> But there's a kind of lust feeds on itself
> Unspoken to, unspeaking; subterranean
> As a black river full of eyeless fish
> Heavy with spawn; with a passion for time
> Longer than the arteries of a cave.

In *The Duchess,* the choleric villain Duke Ferdinand goes mad with Lycanthropia, which the Doctor explains:

> In those that are possess'd with 't there o'erflows
> Such melancholy humour they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into wolves;
> Steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
> One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane
> Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
> Under his shoulder; and he howl'd fearfully;
> Said he was a wolf, only the difference
> Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
> His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
> Rip up his flesh, and try.

Allen Tate's poem, "The Wolves," seems to me to do this even better. It is not his best poem, but it is a very good one, and central to Tate's obsession with evil.

> . . . . Beasts claw the floor.
> I have brooded on angels and archfiends
> But no man has ever sat where the next room's
> Crowded with wolves, and for the honor of man
> I affirm that never have I before . . . .
>
> I've heard the wolves scuffle, and said: So this
> Is man; so — what better conclusion is there —
> The day will not follow night, and the heart
> Of man has a little dignity, but less patience
> Than a wolf's, and a duller sense that cannot
> Smell its own mortality . . . .

Mr. Tate has himself recently commented on his attitudes toward Edgar Allan Poe, another poet of the same tradition. What strikes one about all three is the feeling that violence-and-evil is seen not precisely as a necessity of existence, but as a constant in experience. There is no getting around it, and yet no acceptance either. The

result is both fascination and despair; and its cause may be stated as something like Violence as Gratuitous Act.

Now quite aside from the difficulties of living with such a vision, there are certain clear dangers for the poet. Webster, as T. S. Eliot has remarked, was a poet of tremendous talents, all directed toward chaos. Poe gave in before the attempt to reach any kind of wholeness; and instead of with chaos, which is conducive if not to the greatest art at least to human sympathy, one ends with a kind of meretriciousness which is conducive to nothing if not the impatient shrug of shoulders.

The case for Allen Tate is not so simple to state, since the brief, happily, is not yet closed. One result certainly is a harshness and crudeness of verse which is sometimes striking and fine, but at others damaging. Another is the impulse toward didacticism and rhetoric. Still another, more pertinent just now, is the poet's own consciousness of his situation and of the diminishing alternatives to the chaos which he can neither quite accept nor reject. In *The Winter Sea* (1944), Tate concludes a fine poem, "Winter Mask":

> I asked the master Yeats
> Whose great style could not tell
> Why it is man hates
> His own salvation,
> Prefers the way to hell,
> And finds his last safety
> In the self-made curse that bore
> Him toward damnation:
> The drowned undrowned by the sea,
> The sea worth living for.

The initial question of the poem is:

> I lay the mind's contents
> Bare, as upon a table,
> And ask, in a time of war,
> Whether there is still
> To a mind frivolously dull
> Anything worth living for.

There is, of course, no answer, except for that final paradox:

> The drowned undrowned by the sea,
> The sea worth living for.

Nor is there an answer, finally, in "Seasons of the Soul," a longer (and

finer) poem published in the same volume. It seems to me to be Mr. Tate's best. It marks an advance in a poetic technique already remarkable, and a freedom from the previously underlying note of didacticism with its association, not with "uplift," but with bitter conviction, with the felt need of rhetorical support for the poetry. There seems, perhaps significantly, some abatement of violence, though the same causes for the earlier savagery still exist.

"Seasons of the Soul" employs an elaborately formal structure. It is divided into four sections, each representing one of the seasons. Each section is further divided into six ten-line stanzas, and each section has its own refrain, which passes through subtle modulations at the end of each stanza. The four seasons suggest, in varying degrees, the four ancient elements: fire, air, water, and earth, and this relationship suggests the existential correspondence between the human condition and the material universe which supports it.

The first section, "Summer," is concerned with the present moment, the "nowness" of life to which the poet is ready to give his body, but:

> If now while the body is fresh
> You take it, shall we give
> The heart, lest heart endure
> The mind's tattering
> Blow of greedy claws?

Nor will the present satisfy "Mind":

> Shall mind itself still live
> If like a hunting king
> It falls to the lion's jaws?

This image of mind as hunter is preparation for the inquiry into values, the "hunt" for meaning, which follows. The present is devastating to the soul, as well. Reminiscent of Eliot's wasteland,

> The hot wind dries and draws
> With circular delay
> The flesh, ash from ember,
> Into the summer's jaws.

The present represents the war, which "Shall take the heart escheat." It is the moment which progresses beyond itself, but no further, to insignificance and meaninglessness:

> The southern summer dies
> Evenly in the fall:
> We raise our tired eyes
> Into a sky of glass,
> Blue, empty, and tall

The poet tries to remember childhood, when summer (the present moment) seemed permanent and immutable, and therefore outside of time —

> Before it kept the season
> Of time's engaging jaws.

But this tentative measurement of an earlier vision is displaced by a final vision of summer-as-present in the last stanza of the section, with its Dantesque impact:

> Two men of our summer world
> Descended winding hell
> And when their shadows curled
> They fearfully confounded
> The vast concluding shell:
> Stopping, they saw in the narrow
> Light a centaur pause
> And gaze, then his astounded
> Beard, with a notched arrow,
> Part back upon his jaws.

One remembers Webster's "suburbs of hell" in this confusion of hell with life-in-the-present. The centaur, a curious image, seems to stand for belief, deliberately secular, but yet antipositivist and miracular. The wound, then, becomes obvious. Further, it acts as subtle preparation for the "Winter" section, with its refrain of "the livid wound of love."

It is not, it seems to me, a completely successful section. The scholastic division of body, heart, mind, and soul is treated rather abstractly, and the childhood retrospect is not exploited adequately enough to justify the extension of time in this section, or the abrupt movement away from that to the descent into hell.

The next section, "Autumn," takes up the suggestion of pastness from the retrospect in the first, and becomes a kind of nightmare of the past. The poet is "down a well," and, paradoxically, though past, is "no longer young; / My lips were numb and blue." The padadox is right, for the past is unreal and out-of-life, but permanent and con-

tinuing through life. He finds himself in an empty hall, the past, in which he sees the non-communicating men who people it. His father passes through, and "Gave (me) an unseeing glint"; his mother "had no look or voice/For him whose vision froze/him in the empty hall." He cannot escape the past:

> The door was false — no key
> Or lock, and I was caught
> In the house

but he sees himself fated to it:

> yet I could see
> I had been born to it
> For miles of running brought
> Me back where I began.

The past is the nightmare in which the dreamer is trapped, and which no longer has meaning. The people who pass through are "familiar," and we can accept their procession. But the point is that they have no extension outside the dreamer; the past, however peopled it might be, remains "the cold and empty hall."

It is a brilliant section, physically more real than the "Summer" present:

> The round ceiling was high
> And the gray light like shale
> Thin, crumbling, and dry:
> No rug on the bare floor
> Nor any carved detail
> To which the eye could glide.

There is, further, the same kind of "authority" established for the dramatic point of view which prevails here as in "The Oath," a poem of similar dramatic (and thematic) construction, and one of Mr. Tate's very finest short works. The establishment of person as "real" fictional entity; the inter-relatedness of setting and point of view, which then absorbs and becomes part of the thematic substance, form together a poem of singular power.

He has rejected the present, as we have seen, and now the past as well, for though the nightmare makes him say "I will leave this house," and he ends as one "whose vision froze/Him in the empty hall," there is, finally, nothing there for him. He is trapped but unengaged, in that curious juncture of choice-without-choice where real

life and dreams in the contemporary world merge.

The next section, "Winter," is a harangue to Venus, who (as "*Cold* goddess") he feels is removed from her old commerce with man. Harking back to the first of "More Sonnets at Christmas" (1942):

> Ten years are time enough to be dismayed
> By mummy Christ, head crammed between his knees

there is a similar rejection of religion now:

> For the drying God above,
> Hanged in his windy steeple,
> No longer bears for us
> The living wound of love.

The wrenching here of the traditional Crucifixion symbol is not to be mistaken for any easy anthropological surrogate for paganism. For "All the sea-gods are dead" — and Venus, in returning to her "salt maidenhead" comes back not to a pantheon of gods — either of the real-but-dead-and-mourned gallery, or of the myth-as-wishful-thinking panoply of a contemporary school — but to the modern secular world,

> The tossed anonymous sea
> Under shuddering foam —

And this even with the vision (the most violent in the poem) of its modern secular implications:

> In the center of his cage
> The pacing animal
> Surveys the jungle cove
> And slicks his slithering wiles
> To turn the venereal awl
> In the livid wound of love.

The speaker finds himself standing within a grove of "Headless, unageing oak/That gives the leaf no more," a symbol-monument of the past (but also of the modern world), unageing but fruitless as in the "Autumn" section. He breaks a branch and hears the "Speaking blood/From the livid wound of love":

> 'We are the men who died
> Of self-inflicted woe,
> Lovers whose stratagem
> Led to their suicide.'

The obvious allusion is to the Civil War dead of the South. Tate has curiously identified their monument, the oak, with the madrepore, a coral reef which "resists the winter's flow." *Madrepore* literally means mother-stone; its use here is multi-levelled and brilliant. The speaker is descended from these men (he is "their brother"), and he becomes then a child of stone, removed from Venus and the "living wound of love." Like them, he is "maimed" and paradoxically, does not bear the living wound of love. An important distinction has been set up between the "livid" and the "living" wounds of love; the former human and crippling, the latter (which "the drying God above . . . No longer bears for us") we may take to be eternal and redemptive. It is as close as one comes here to any solution: love, even with the brutal "venereal awl" implication seems to have some positive value. The poet looks with despair for the eternal love which Venus once has symbolized, the living wound of love, recognizing it as perhaps the one real principle of wholeness. But there is a difference between the recognized and the available, and there is after all no final answer.

The final section, "Spring," is a kind of incantation to "the mother of silences." Vivienne Koch (in "The Poetry of Allen Tate," *Kenyon Review,* Summer 1949) has traced the figure to Saint Monica, who appears in St. Augustine's *Confessions,* and whose death leaves Augustine "With a living wound 'from having that most sweet and dear habit of living together suddenly broken off.'" Together they had catalogued "a set of earthly conditions which, could they be 'silenced', would enable them to arrive at an apprehension of the hereafter." It is concerned again with the past, this section, but now not the limited past of one's forebears and one's immediate traditions (the pre-Civil War South), but with the wider historical past. The speaker moves toward it through his own past first:

> Back in my native prime
> I saw the orient corn
> All space but no time . . .

and then to a pondering of time as human condition:

> In time of bloody war
> Who will know the time?
> Is it a new spring star
> Within the timing chill,
> Talking, or just a mime,
> That rises in the blood —
> Thin Jack-and-Jilling seas
> Without the human will?

The "mother of silences" seems to flow from the earlier madrepore, mother-stone, symbol, and to contain within herself something of the love-principle of the "Winter" section. But at the same time, the mother of silences is Death, and the question of the significance of man in time involves not only the problems of progress and will, but of death. And the new question, actually, is whether death postpones reality or transforms it. Earlier in the section, in speaking of his home, he has said:

> It was a pleasant land
> Where even death could please
> Us with an ancient pun —
> All dying for the hand
> Of the mother of silences.

The pun of course is the Elizabethan use of "dying" to mean sexual consummation, and there is a uniting in this symbol of both love and death. Here one feels that there can be both value and dignity in death: it transforms reality.

> But in the present, the answer to the question:
> In time of bloody war
> Who will know the time?

the answer comes in one of the most sustained and brilliant stanzas in the poem:

> It burns us each alone
> Whose burning arrogance
> Burns up the rolling stone,
> This earth — Platonic cave
> Of vertiginous chance!
> Come, tired Sisyphus,
> Cover the cave's egress
> Where light reveals the slave,
> Who rests when sleeps with us
> The mother of silences.

The "slave who rests" seems to be the Platonic soul confined to the mortal body, and it is the very essence of the Sisyphus myth that the cave of mortality can never be covered. And there is nothing else then, finally, but the cave. And while the poet calls:

> Come, old woman, save
> Your sons who have gone down
> Into the burning cave:

and asks that she come and gaze

> These fifteen centuries
> Upon the shirking scene
> Where men, blind, go lame

she cannot really meet that first condition of "silencing" mortality to allow escape into the hereafter, and the poet is left in that terrible skepticism where he both affirms her myth and denies her efficacy:

> Listen, while we confess
> That we conceal our fear.
> Regard us, while the eye
> Discerns by sight or guess
> Whether, as sheep foregather
> Upon their crooked knees,
> We have begun to die.

And, for ending, he can only ask

> Whether your kindness, mother,
> Is mother of silences.

The doubt, whether the "kindness' of death is, simply, death, seems the final outcry of that solipsism which has denied the meaningful reality of the other seasons. If this is so, then death is postponement (not transformation), the meaningless ebb and flow of integers, "as sheep foregather/Upon their crooked knees" in a world of "vertiginous chance" — a world in which man already deprived of valid will ("Where men, blind . . .") has lost its capacity for significant action (. . . "go lame.") The poet is not sure: this is no answer, but a question.

Yet, it is an answer too, insofar as we see the failure of the other alternatives. The important thing after all is not so much the final answer, but the passion and integrity of the questions. Unless indeed one is to ask of Allen Tate that happy conciliation in the final curtain speech, like Webster's, that puts an end to questions and answers alike.

BOBB DAVIS:

Alice

Dressed in the dun of ripe
leaves Alice half-turns in charmed
Pre-Raphaelite trees, her arms
half-lifted and her face unformed
over the naked grin.

She is lost, and the trees point
all ways: the loaded path withdraws
under her feet, the fruit withers
around her, and she knows
all that can happen

if she should stretch her hand.
Once upon a time in the same angle
of incidence and reflection she
and the lion walked in the same jungle,
her hand upon his mane.

And she is delivered to the same
position of rescue where he understood
their prearranged meeting, where
all maiden modesty she left her blood
pinned on the thorn.

She holds the painted edge
of a flickering smile, a thousand eyes
blossom around her as the woods darken
and she is caught in the nether memory
of nymph and faun.

Frankie

In ransomed prisons coward prisoners the juke
box for a nickel and she for the lotus honey
of muscatel will lift her head from the table
and tell the story building her tower of talk

by the doomed stitch of stars and shaming
cluck of waves, and by the beacon fires
lighting her bent face, the cigarette wagging
between her lips, by the signal of his coming

(Monday) how she had looked all day and seen
only the neighbor's laundry drying in the sun,
how she had stood watching the shirts wave in
the wind, and that, remembering it then,

the Lucky package shone through his white
pocket like a red target pinned over the heart.
And for another nickel the needle traces
the same pattern, plotting the tattooed

map to the same magic and the treasure
where she sits unwinding the dark path
to the bull's-eye, where she holds forever
the ironed ships streamered to shore.

FRANK O'HARA:

The Three-Penny Opera

I think a lot about
the Peachums: Polly
and all the rest are
free and fair. Her jewels
have price tags in case
they want to change
hands, and her pets
are carnivorous. Even
the birds.
Whenever our
splendid hero Mackie
Messer, what an honest
man! steals or kills, there
is meaning for you! Oh
Mackie's knife has a false
handle so it can express
its meaning as well as
his. Mackie's not one to
impose his will. After all
who does own any thing?

But Polly, are you a
shadow? Is Mackie projected
to me by light through film?
If I'd been in Berlin in
1930, would I have seen you
ambling the streets like
Krazy Kat?
Oh yes. Why,
when Mackie speaks we
only know what he means
occasionally. His sentence
is an image of the times.
You'd have seen all of us

masquerading. Chipper; but
not so well arranged. Air-
ing old poodles and pre-war
furs in narrow shoes
with rhinestone bows.
Silent, heavily perfumed.
Black around the eyes. You
wouldn't have known who
was who, though. Those
were intricate days.

GEORGE ANTHONY:

Wild Colt

He was the youngest one
And played in the sun
While brothers grew serious
And sisters kept house.

Playmates were shadows swept
Under quick steps.
Wild as a colt the boy
Shied from decoys.

Shadows grew old and thin
Cedars of wind.
Over the shaggy heart
Light fell apart.

Blinded the pony ran
Until tripped by the scythe.
The grasshopper's kissing song
Rang blithely inside.

DOROTHY KELSON:

The Mould

Ready to die.
Ready to cast aside the mould.
The plaster is worn and dirty.
The body is creased and cold.

Bury it; cover it.

The fine line,
The ugly bulge
Pressed into lovers
And passersby
And passersby.

The mould has created world.
Its work is done now.
Done now.
Dunow.

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